

# **Community Perception on the Redevelopment of Old Dhaka Based on Local Solutions**

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## **Introduction**

Dhaka the capital city of Bangladesh has merely been nourished with any planning guidelines or stringent development control policy since its inception. As a result, the city has been developed with lots of deprivation resulting in numerous problems such as traffic congestion, water logging, sewerage and drainage problem, water supply, gas and electricity problem, crime, unhygienic environment and many others. The old city of Dhaka (Strategic Planning Zone, SPZ 3), the most densely populated and congested area of the city inhabited by almost a million people, possesses 15% of the total population living in the city's urbanized area (Urban Area Plan (1995-2005)). Occupying only 7% of the gross built-up area, it exhibits densities well in excess of the normal gross urban densities of 323 ppa, in localised areas with net residential densities in excess of 2000 ppa (Urban Area Plan, 1995-2005). Despite increasing congestion, a paucity of social and community facilities, inadequate and poorly maintained infrastructure and ever-increasing costs for ever-diminishing space, the evidence of existing trends suggests that the old city will experience a continued influx of population and densification well into the future.

Various collective initiatives, measures and researches undertaken to address various problems with their tentative remedies have stumbled in various times due to lack of proper institutional set up, non-conformal policy implementation with local settings, lack of community efforts, lack of political stability and the last but not the least, ignoring people's participation in problem identification, their perception regarding intensity of any particular problem and possible remedies that are likely to be enforceable and preferred by the local inhabitants. Old Dhaka signifies a lot by offering a contrast with the new Dhaka, but the existing situation can never support the future growth unless the old city is brought under long term sustainable policy framework.

So an informative study based on the application of participatory methods can reveal an authentic and clear picture reflecting the state of mind and perception of the inhabitants of Old Dhaka regarding the intensity and magnitude of their problems and possible remedies felt by them.

## **Literature Review**

Public participation has been a neglected issue in our planning practice though it has wide applicability in effective and workable plan preparation and implantation. Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP) has proposed several development actions, policies and strategies for improvement of Dhaka. The old part of the city mentioned by SPZ 3 is given emphasis mainly on relocation of Central Jail, urban renewal of neighbourhood and redesign of Wari (First planned residential neighbourhood of modern Dhaka). The plan also has initiated community based development techniques through local leaders as the increasing demand of

public participation in development activities has proved to be effective enough to address and generate solution of local problem (Structure Plan, 1995). But when the issue of redevelopment has come into question, participation could play its impetus by accelerating the concerted efforts of various development agencies and other responsible authorities.

A definition suggested by Municipality of Canada, Alberta that area redevelopment plan is an urban planning designation created by municipalities for the purpose of facilitating development in specific geographic areas. ARPs differ from Area structure plans in that they apply to areas of a municipality that have already been developed. In practice, ARPs are used to guide how an existing built-up area or neighbourhood should develop in the future. Community representatives are often by municipal planners to contribute to ARPs. ARPs tend to be created for inner city areas that are currently redeveloping or are soon to redevelop.

Another way of defining development is the demolition of old, redundant or unfashionable buildings and the construction of new ones on the same site. It is any new construction on a site that has pre-existing uses on it such as the redevelopment of an industrial site into a mixed-use development or the redevelopment of a block of townhouses into a large apartment building. Urban infill on vacant parcels that have no existing activity but were previously developed is also sometimes referred to as redevelopment ([www.Wikipedia.com](http://www.Wikipedia.com)).

Physical decline makes redevelopment a necessity for cities and reinvestment is needed to reverse declining incomes and the loss of middle-class populations. Private redevelopment requires public assistance through use of eminent domain, development subsidies, and regulatory incentives. Community development corporations have emerged as the principle alternative to public and private redevelopment efforts which contribute to displacement (Koebel, 1996).

Three comprehensive redevelopment efforts were undertaken in Boston Public Housing Projects in 1980s. People involved with these redevelopment efforts suggested seven successes of these projects including smooth implementation, recognized design quality, improved tenant organization capacity, enhanced maintenances and management performance, improved security, progress in socio-economic development, resident satisfaction (Vale, 1996).

Launched in 1992, the \$5 billion HOPE VI program represents a dramatic turnaround in public housing policy and one of the most ambitious urban redevelopment efforts in United States of America's history. It replaces severely distressed public housing projects, occupied exclusively by poor families, with redesigned mixed-income housing and provides housing vouchers to enable some of the original residents to rent apartments in the private market. Although the physical revitalization of public housing developments has been slow-in some cases, taking more than a decade-completed HOPE VI sites have dramatically improved not only the aesthetics of public housing, but also improved the street layouts, redesigned open spaces and enhanced landscaping (Popkin et al., 2004).

Now-a-days many development projects are launched through people's participation in many countries. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercises were conducted in late 2003 in Hanh Phuoc Commune in Vietnam. Results of the PRA have provided a foundation for understanding local farming systems and resources in the Commune. These results have consequently been used to support the design of RUDEP activities in Hanh Phuoc (Quang Ngai Rural Development Program (RUDEP) - Phase 2, 2004).

People's participation in development activates has become well recognized in developed and developing countries but redevelopment projects warrant such participation to a great extent. According to Salama (1999) an appropriate standard for resident participation in project

planning is difficult to establish but is essential if projects are not to be mired in long-term delays. The Asia Forest Network supports the role of communities in protection and sustainable use of natural forests (The Community Forest Management Support Project 2000 for Southeast Asia, 2002).

Participatory practice is limited in Bangladesh. Except in slum improvement projects (1985) and National Environmental Mapping, still no public authorities practiced community involvement in development practice though, from 1950s and '60s in community development the involvement of local people had been practiced in many countries (Roy and Sowgat, 2005). According to Roy and Sowgat (2005) failures of development projects in Khulna due to lack of community involvement tend to introduce the idea of people's participation in development suggested repeatedly in new Structure Plan and Master Plan of Khulna.

In Bangladesh, the concept of redevelopment is still a growing issue. No redevelopment project has yet been undertaken though the concept has been suggested in Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan especially for the Old Dhaka. So this study is mainly concerned with perception of the people of Old Dhaka regarding their locality as solution of numerous problems.

### **Methodology**

The study has been conducted using various participatory approaches with active participation of the inhabitants of the Hussaini Dalan Mahalla, ward 63, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) as an indication of the typical Old Dhaka's struggle through the ages (Figure 1). The study is very much indicative of the local people's perception about their day to day stress and struggles as the participation of the inhabitants was inclusive of various occupational groups, local rental households, land owners, businessmen, local community based organizations and discussion with key informants and some influential persons of the study area. To explore and analyze the problems of the study area, the following tools are applied.

**Time Line:** To explore the temporal dimension from a historical perspective of the area.

**Pair-wise Ranking:** To rank the problems of the study area the basis of magnitude and severity of the problems.

**Cause Effect Diagram:** To explore the reasons and effects of the problems.

**Daily Activity Schedule:** To identify the congestion point and time of traffic jam at different roads of the area.

**Seasonal Diagram:** To investigate the seasonal variation in the locality regarding water logging.

**Mobility Map:** To show the degree of contact between the community and the outside world.

**Venn Diagram:** To investigate linkages, relationships and interactions between different institutions, organizations, groups and influential individuals in the community and their importance in decision making.

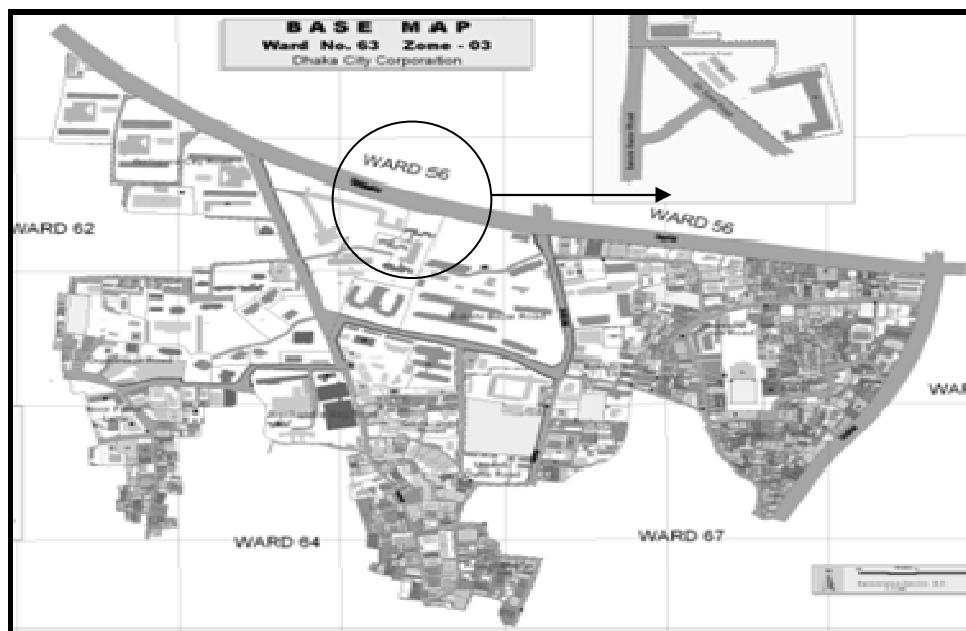


Fig. 1: Ward 63

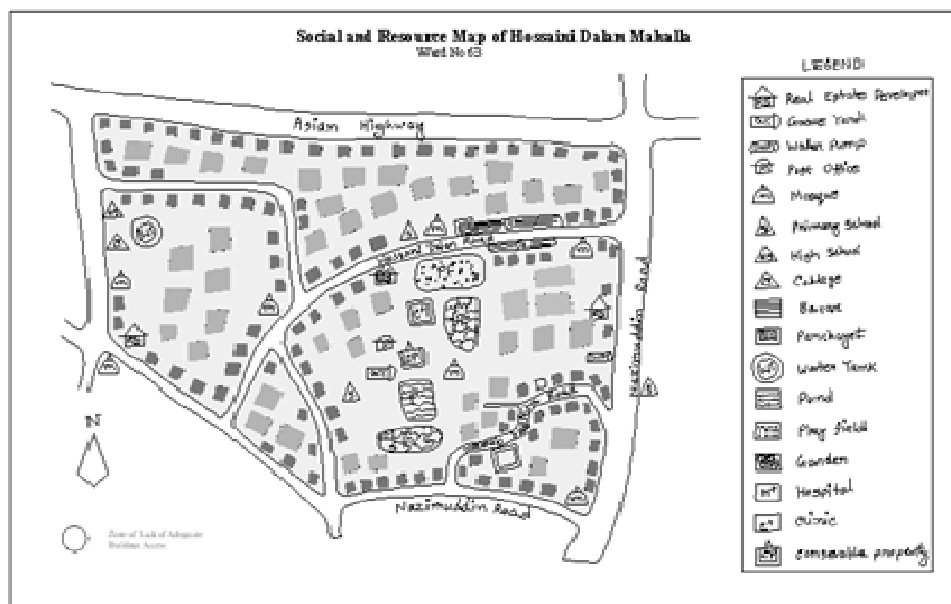


Fig. 2: Hussaini Dalan Mahalla

### Historic Background of the Study Area

Old Dhaka is an amalgam of different cultural practices experienced from the various colonial traders like the Portugese, Dutch, French, Armanians, Iranians and the Greeks during the

Mughal and post Mughal period. The study area, Hussaini Dalan mahalla of ward no 63 is composed of most of the generic characteristics of Old Dhaka (Figure 2). The indigenous people living in this locality and the religious as well as historic appeal can be regarded as a burning witness of the glorious history of the growth of Old Dhaka. The establishment of the study area is much more related to the establishment of the Hussiani Dalan in 1642 though this area was reputed as the residential area of the then Mughal officials and representatives. But the actual growth of the study area initiated just after the construction of Bazzare-e-Murad by the then superintendent of the Nawara (Fleet of Boats) estates of Nizamat. At that period the surrounding area of the Hussaini Dalan was the garden of the Nawab representing the Mughal power.

The study area has been built up just beside the oldest commercial area (i.e. Chawkbazar, Moulovibazar etc.) of Old Dhaka. Trading was the major occupation for the local people for a long time after the Mughal period. Where abundance of open space and water body were the life supporting elements now there is hardly any open space available for the inhabitants of the study area. At that time merely some informal houses with thatched roof was observed by the indigenous people. Even in the year 1961 there was only four pucca structure in the study area. Trend of constructing high rise buildings started in the arrival of 2000 and there have been observed 3 ongoing housing development projects in the study area. It is clearly understood from this information that the uncontrolled population growth resulting in emergence of various occupational groups and the huge influx of migrants necessitated the area to be transformed into a high density area after the liberation period thereby losing its unique character as prevailed in the Mughal or pre liberation period like residential or commercial area.

### **Existing Problems of Old Dhaka**

Problems prevailing in the study area have been identified with primary observation with local people and then were ranked using pair-wise ranking method on the basis of their magnitude and severity through group discussion with people from all levels and walks of lives. The top three problems including water logging, traffic congestion and lack of adequate building access have been investigated and analyzed to get an insight into the reasons and effects they are putting in the study area. Then the participants were asked to generate solutions for solving the existing problems.

#### **Water Logging**

Water logging is an instantaneous occurrence during rainy season if it rains heavily just for 10 to 15 minutes. Drains filled up, roads drenched out, normal life become vulnerable and disturbed. Unhygienic environment rise up and create the life steady like still picture by disrupting movement and accessibility to activities and works.

#### **Traffic Congestion**

The external pressures from surrounding commercial land use and restaurant businesses create extreme traffic congestion in the peripheral roads and inner roads of the Mahalla which have been explored by using time line and daily activity schedule (Figure 3). Thus traffic congestion use to make a great loss in terms of time, money, and day to day activity.



Fig. 3: Traffic Congestion in Nazimuddin Road

### **Lack of Adequate Building Access**

Construction, development and fragmentation of land do not follow the rules of subdivision and RAJUK's Building Construction Regulation which has been revealed by force field analysis. Moreover, time line shows that with the increase in population, height of the buildings have been increased and development become congested without letting space for open space or access roads. That is why access roads become narrow and building access become difficult. It is quite impossible for an ambulance or fire brigade vehicles to get into the affected area. Some roads are so narrow that even two person cannot walk together.

### **Drainage**

Open drains with lower capacity than the demand deduct both the sewerage and storm water simultaneously (Figure 4). For being open, these drains exhibit odours and pollute the environment as the regular maintenance and repair works are not done by DESA. It also reduces the capacity of roads for movement of vehicles.



Fig. 4: Open drain with low capacity

### **Water Supply**

Quality and quantity should be maintained for safe drinking water for sound health whereas the quality of water supplied is not safe for drinking and other purposes. Moreover, the existing water transmission and distribution pipes are not sufficient enough to cope with existing demand and lower income people has to collect water from deep tube well for the absence of direct water supply. Thus pipe line extension works go on throughout the year.

### Inherent Causes of Existing Situation

Rapid growth of population creates subsequent pressure on the land of overpopulated Dhaka City. To provide housings for the increasing population, agricultural lands, low lands, wet lands, water bodies and natural drainage are filled up and developed haphazardly. This urbanization and unplanned development activities create obstruction to natural drainage pattern, and reduce retention ponds. Though the smart growth nature of the study area is no way either an appreciable identity of this modern age in this historic locality but the development in and around the study area is very congested creating a lot more problems in daily life of the inhabitants. The congested development hinders the movement of fresh air and sunlight through the small windows of the buildings and thinking of breathing space is miracle, both together deteriorating the residential quality of the area in a great extent.

Commercial land use is the main dominant characteristics of Old Dhaka which is pivoted around Chawkbazaar as it is the starting of the commercial flow and now old Dhaka is famous for its business, small industries and restaurant businesses generating huge traffic to the entire area creating traffic congestion. Moreover existence of central jail generates traffic from outside the area and traffics use to trespass the study area for going to their destination. In a study on ward 60 of old Dhaka shows that 30% floor area is used for residential purpose where as 25% for commercial (Debnath et al., 2008).

Through time line and cause-effect diagram, the chronological change in the area has been studied. Geographically the study area is low lying and surrounding areas are in higher elevation that causes water stagnation if it rains heavily. Moreover, with the passage of time, water bodies such as ponds, lakes and canals in the area are encroached through unauthorized and illegal construction (Figure 5). Thus the micro climate of the area has been changed and it makes the drainage system ineffective to drain out the rain water. Most of the natural drainage potentials of Old Dhaka disappeared or are in way to lose their existence due to private encroachment. A good number of khals criss-crossing the city, having some of their out falls in the rivers and used to play a very significant role in the drainage of the city area. During the 1960s, there were around 50 khals in Dhaka City and their length was 256 km. But due to the encroachment, at present, only 26 khals can still be traced and their length is 125km (The Daily Inqilab, 2004).

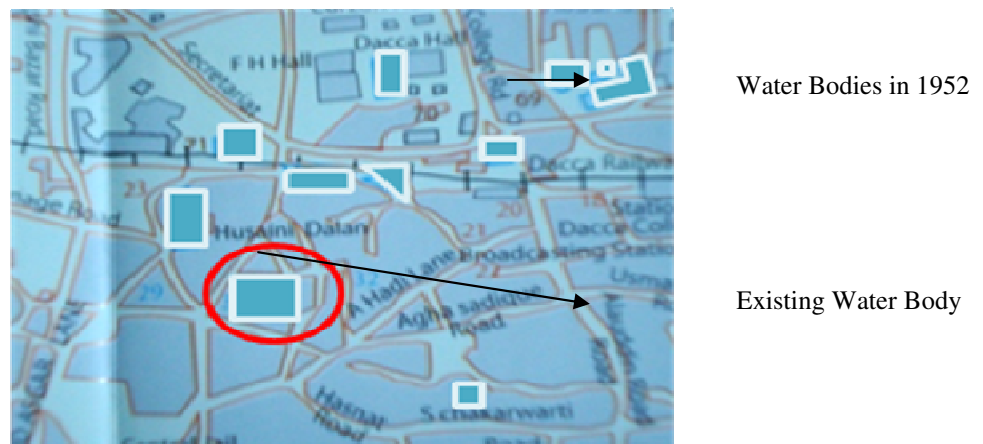


Fig. 5: Water Bodies Surrounding Hussiani Dalan Area in 1952

When the study area was established, the original road layout pattern and the width did not cause any problem for the indigenous people. Roads were for horse driven vehicles and the access roads were for few inhabitants living there. Even after the liberation, the capacity of the road was much higher and it was easily accessible by the inhabitants of the study area. But now the narrow access roads coupled with high population growth is no longer suitable to provide easy access to their adobe, which is forcing indigenous people to move to other spaces for residence. A study conducted in ward 60 revealed that 58% people are not the inherited owners rather they bought the land (Debnath et al., 2008).

Since the area has been treated as a lucrative residential area for living, from a very early stage of the independence, land price accelerated day by day. Now-a-days the high land price does not persuade the land owners willing to sacrifice a portion of their land for public welfare or any road improvement or widening projects. In addition, numerous land owners due to land fragmentation do not leave land for wide access roads. Thus haphazard and spontaneous development of Old Dhaka has assumed such an alarming situation that at present, RAJUK does not provide any building permit in the area. But construction of building is going on its own fashion within the study area without maintaining the setback regulation and even without the permission from the RAJUK.

### **Community Perception and Formal Planning Document**

Old Dhaka is one of the densest areas of Dhaka City and the population is increasing day by day. Unless it is managed in a planned way, after some day it will fully unsuitable to live. So, it is high time to bring the old city under redevelopment project through which the people can be accommodated in the existing area with the required density. The DMDP consolidation strategy supports vertical expansion to accommodate the dense population and to mitigate the horizontal expansion of the city.

Since common notion explains that general people do not think about the causes of problem generation and are not aware of the fact that leads to the solution of the problems. But from participatory group discussion it has been found that people's perception is likely to the formulated strategies. For removing the problems of the area they have given solutions on the basis of their local context and values.

Problems, identified at a local level by group discussion but representative of the entire Old Dhaka, have assumed such a proportion which defies almost all solution. Participatory solutions have been cornered to the relocation of the central jail, community police for traffic control, making covered drains, widening the roads, increasing outlet with higher capacity, community traffic police and the involvement of the related institutions and social organizations to work efficiently. It is quite clear from the above mentioned participatory solutions that features of extensive changes are inherent in the solutions which, in technical term, can be compared to redevelopment activities because, if covered drains are constructed along with existing drains that will not be able to meet the present demand though road capacity will be increased through covered the drains along the roads. So, reconstruction is needed for roads. On the other hand, relocation of central jail also indicates the redevelopment of that place indirectly.

On the other hand, proposed DMDP policies for Old Dhaka including relocation of central jail, Community base development techniques (through local leaders) for urban renewal, vertical expansion while carrying out urban renewal, preparation of utility development plans, detailed traffic management plan, linking the area with the mass transit scheme, widening project for the road etc. Here the mismatch between people's perception and DMDP policies lies in the two terms: redevelopment and urban renewal. The former indicates the



reconstruction of anything where it requires while keeping the existing culture and tradition intact whereas the later indicates the reconstruction through demolition of all sorts of built up structure including historic structures.

So, local perception has revealed that redevelopment is required where such action does not conflict with the preservation of their historic glories and traditions whereas planning document indicates quite different strategy. Here, the community perception regarding the solution of local problems observed as a demand for the emergence of redevelopment which has been intensified through public participation in ward 63 by using PRA tools, This qualitative perception also complies with ward 60 of Old Dhaka where it has been found that 63% population agreed with redevelopment for having better quality of life (Islam et al., 2008).

### **Emergence of Participatory Redevelopment Approach**

People must be at the centre of development not only in the traditional sense that people are the engine of change, but also in the less-traditional sense of development that puts people first. People are the critical factor in development: firstly in terms of their numbers and the social, health, economic and environmental consequences of their actions; and secondly in terms of the decisions they make concerning the size of their families and the way they live their lives. People-centred development also means full community participation at both decision-making and implementation levels. “True and sustainable development cannot take place thorough control over development and top down development approach” (Sadik, 1993).

It is the prime responsibility of public authorities to ensure planned development. But, it involves substantial cost. And it is impossible to deliver planned city environment in the large tract of unplanned city area by the public cost. Moreover, implementation of any development project is a long procedure in terms of approval and land acquisition. All most all individual developers frequently violate development control rules since all development approaches are top down in nature. It barely helps the mass people who are middle to lower income citizen. As, due to high land value, planned residential neighbourhood areas are beyond their affordability. Again, after construction of road, though land value rises, land developers tend to take its advantage. Real land owner fail to construct their own buildings from their own savings.

In Bangladesh plans are prepared by top down approach which cannot focus on the local demand, even though community can perceive their problems best but they are ignored from the planning procedures. “In Bangladesh, Development organizations fail to integrate common peoples in none of the development works. Their existing planning practices fail to convey, what they are doing for common people and in return what should common people do” (Roy & Swogat, 2009).

Redevelopment of Old Dhaka is now a public demand arising out by a participatory approach and therefore important for conducting such a vast redevelopment project which could ensure people’s active participation during the course of action and planning as they are concerned with the non-technical version of redevelopment. So for Old Dhaka, not urban renewal but redevelopment should be the emerging issue as solution which has been revealed by community perception so that actual outcome and fruit of redevelopment can be gained only by people’s participation in planning and implementation process. So, there is an emergence of participatory redevelopment approach for Old Dhaka rather top-down urban renewal to keep the essence of historic tradition and culture of the Old Dhakaiaias.

## Conclusion

Glorious city of past is becoming unsuitable as for residence with passage of time due to the growth of population and related activities. The past aristocratic residential area has lost its own upheaval and causes the indigenous inhabitants to migrate another place for living a better quality of life. Problems facing by the area have been identified through public participation using various PRA tools and group discussion. People generated notions for the betterment of the area directly and indirectly induce the emergence of redevelopment of the area for sustainable Old Dhaka. Any development approach will be successful if only public wants their area to be under such approach and their positive steps toward the approach is the prime requirement to gain betterment in full extent. So for sustainable Old Dhaka redevelopment has become people's demand for living quality of life keeping past glory full with traditional cultural practice and values intact while participation of public should be ensured in planning processes rather the mere planning decision of urban renewal.

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